

United by Civil Rights

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Being born in the late 70's, I never experienced the brutal and blatant slavery, racism, and discrimination my people had to endure in this so-called free world of America. The ugliness and evil that sparked and shaped the Civil Rights era can still be heard through the pain from those whispered memories.

While growing up in the projects on the west side of Chicago the extent of my knowledge concerning the civil rights era was limited to Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks. No one really painted a vivid picture of that time and place, so it was L.L. Cool J and Magic Johnson who I admired more than anyone as a kid growing up.

I honestly knew nothing of my sisters and brothers from different fathers and mothers that were bonded together in the intimate struggle for the upliftment and salvation of this place called the United States of America. It would be only through personal experience, trials and tribulations with my own ignorance and fear that I would learn of the burn for love and peace called the civil rights movement, that not even vicious attack dogs, bombs and hangings could overshadow or underscore.

Many people of color and creeds fed the fire back then that continues to feed Black America's hunger for opportunity and possibility today. I would be writing forever if I were to give a name-by-name account and credit to all those wonderful souls who played a vital role and pivotal part in the luxuries, education, and hopes that I am provided with today that I sometimes take for

granted. However, a special mention must be made of Thurgood Marshall, Emmett Till, Malcom X, Elijah Muhammad, the Freedom Fighters, Stokely Carmichael, students from Greensboro N.C., James Meredith, and a host of other known and not so well known men, women, and children who are heroes. Heroes who protested in peace and rioted in anger for equal rights in this country called the free world. However, the Civil Rights movement was not a movement of names but a movement of spirits and truths.

The influence of those warriors who preserved the soul and spirit of African Slaves speak volumes of black power today just as loud as they did during the Civil Rights era. Those who held affection for the movement and kept their hearts and minds glued on the same cause and the same goal, and gave their blood, sweat, tears, and lives for a better life and nation for people of color, need never be forgotten by us.

Oh how I love these people who came together in unity and vitality singing the song of “We Shall Overcome” so that I could sit, eat, sleep, shop, learn, and work wherever my heart desires! For me, a poor child of the ghetto this gift was giving!

For me these beautiful people stood up and met head on nightmarish conditions and pains, and spoke out with a thunderous shout that demanded a better America not only for themselves, but also for the children who were yet to be born. The Civil Rights era gave birth to the black is beautiful mentality, which in turn ushered in the “I’m black and I’m proud era”. Many barriers and injustices have been broken down, equal rights and affirmative actions are now established. I’m so proud and grateful for my people who had that courage and undying love for each other as they dreamed of equal rights and went after it by any means necessary! It did not matter if they were up north or down south, out west or over east, everyone knew that they were strangers of the same struggle, so

they came as they were and were as they came, “descendents of kings and queens”! The Civil Rights era inspires hope today! It is the greatest accomplishment on the face of this earth by a race of people without military warfare or the splitting of a sea.

Civil Rights caresses me while I sleep, gives me solitude, watches over me and comforts my fears and weaknesses. Even more so beautiful and greater is the way the struggle of the civil rights era broke down unseen hatred in black people for black people, and the hate in other people for blacks, it united people living in this country. Truly making the Constitution worth something more than words on paper by bringing us a little closer to being in a state of united people in America.

I owe so much to the freedom fighters of that time! So many people cried, fought, bled, and died for the freedoms I misuse. Here I am in prison writing this because I chose to take the easy route. I guess I am either too afraid or too lazy to fight in a positive way, work hard, and struggle for a better life. How do you think Dr. Martin Luther King would feel about how I use the gift (their lives) he and so many others gave? So in hindsight and foresight I understand Bill Cosby when he says that we need to parent our children better than we have been, and we could speak better than some of us do. Honestly how many slaves died just for trying to learn how to read and write? How many blacks have put their lives on the line so that we could experience and enjoy the liberties of this country? Do “you” think Mr. Cosby has a right to be upset with the overall progress and direction of our people??? Maybe so, maybe not, who is to say? I for one can honestly say that I have not been building upon the foundation that was laid down during the Civil Rights era, and because of that I take his message to heart.

With all the multimillion-dollar sports contracts, and multi-platinum records, and all of this quick easy money to be made from naked booty shaking and street corner hustling, we need to

remember that the Civil Rights movement was a path to freedom and peace that was paved in blood, and now we as black people have liberties that we can exercise and utilize, that some of us do not capitalize upon. And sometimes when we do use them, we misuse and abuse them for selfish purposes and gains, which in turn divides the very same structure and bond that united us by civil rights.